

Australia's 2015 UPR—NGO Coalition Fact Sheet 9

Women

Policy responses to women's human rights issues in Australia often lack a focus on achieving *substantive* equality for all women. Many women in Australia are deprived of their human rights as a result of an intersection of gender and another aspect of their identity. For example, women with disability are more likely to live in poverty than other women and women in remote, rural and regional areas are less likely to have adequate access to contraception and sexual and reproductive health care than other women.

Australia's Federal-level discrimination laws are enacted in separate legislation according to the identity aspect (sex, age, disability etc) which is the basis for discrimination. As a result of this structure, it is difficult to access effective remedies for discrimination which occurs as a result of the intersection of two or more aspects of a woman's identity.

Proposed Recommendation:

Australia should ensure that all gender equality policies and programs are grounded in the concept of substantive equality and provide effective remedies to address intersectional discrimination.

Women's Economic Equality

Australia needs to ensure economic equality in Australia, including supporting women in leadership, improving access to childcare and addressing the unequal distribution of unpaid caring work.

Australia has significant gendered gaps in wages and retirement savings. The current national gender pay gap is 19.9% calculated on full-time base remuneration and 24.7% calculated on full-time total remuneration, which is a 20-year high. Women in Australia retire with 45.7% less superannuation (retirement savings) than men. The proportion of women with no retirement savings (38.5%) is higher than the proportion of men with no retirement savings (31.6%).

The Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) was established by the Australian Government in 2012. WGEA's functions include collecting data on the gendered pay gap and women's leadership in business. As part of the data collection, businesses with more than 100 employees report on gender equality outcomes across six Gender Equality Indicators. This data collection was challenged by

the Australian Government in 2014 as being too extensive. There is no equivalent alternative data source regarding gendered workplace trends.

In 2013, the Australian Bureau of Statistics announced that it did not have sufficient Commonwealth funding to conduct the *Work, Life and Family Survey: Work, Care and Family Balance* (WoLFS), which includes the Time Use Survey, which is an important source of data regarding the unpaid care and domestic work carried out by women and a vital starting point for policy work in areas such as child care policy and understanding the wage gap. Under current funding, WoLFS will not be conducted again until 2019. The Australian Government has also recently suggested the National Census might be conducted on a 10-year cycle rather than the current 5-year cycle.

Proposed Recommendation:

Australia should address the gendered wage gap, including collecting a range of gender disaggregated data about the needs of diverse groups of women and preventing any reduction in workplace gender equality reporting.

Violence against Women

High rates of violence against women remain a major issue in Australia, with almost one-in-three Australian women experiencing physical violence and almost one-in-five women experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime.

In 2011, the Australian Government released the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010 – 2022. The First Action Plan covered the period from 2010 – 2013. The Second Action Plan under the National Plan runs from 2013-2016. There is an Evaluation Plan which states that evaluation of the National Plan should involve civil society and other stakeholders.

The National Plan Implementation Panel (NPIP) was set up to enable civil society to advise on the implementation of the National Plan and its monitoring and evaluation. However, the poor functioning and subsequent dissolution of the NPIP has left a gap in the Government's engagement with civil society. Further, civil society have not been resourced to participate in the evaluation of the First Action Plan and currently no mechanism is in place to enable meaningful participation. The

Evaluation Plan makes no provision for independent assessment of the outcomes of the Action Plans. The review of the First Action Plan has not been completed.

Women from some population groups are particularly vulnerable to violence and experience difficulties in accessing services and support. There is limited access to family violence and sexual assault services in all areas, but particularly in rural and remote areas. Women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds face difficulties in reporting violence and accessing culturally appropriate accommodation.

Violence against women with disabilities often goes undetected, unreported or uninvestigated, and there is a lack of access to appropriate services, including crisis accommodation, for women with disabilities. The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children does not cover violence occurring in institutional settings which means that women with disability experiencing violence while in care are not protected by the Plan.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women experience horrific levels of violence and are 35 times more likely to be hospitalised as a result of spousal or partner violence than non-Indigenous women. Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women is associated with a number of factors, including racism, dispossession, disadvantage and poor living conditions.

The Second Action Plan acknowledges the need to address violence against women facing multiple disadvantage, but has not been adequately resourced to address the needs of those women.

Specialist women's services that are vital in responding appropriately to women and children impacted by violence have not been sufficiently resourced under the National Plan. Specialist services are facing funding reductions whilst also experiencing increased service demand.

Proposed Recommendation:

Australia should adequately fund the National Plan, including women-specific services, and establish an independent mechanism to evaluate the implementation of the National Plan.